

## Social Capital Blog

Wisdom on social capital, human interaction, civic engagement and community through research, news stories and life.

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# Twitter, Facebook and YouTube's role in Arab Spring (Middle East uprisings) [UPDATED 5/23/12]

Posted on [January 26, 2011](#) by [socialcapital](#) | [6 Comments](#)



Flickr photo of Tunisian protests by marcovdz

Democracy has finally come to parts of the mid-East and Northern Africa. What has been the role of social media and the Internet in these uprisings?

First the facts and then some discussion of the role of social media:

**Background:** The “Arab Spring” in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere in the Mid-East heavily relied on the Internet, social media and technologies like Twitter, TwitPic, Facebook and YouTube in the early stages to accelerate social protest. There are even [allegations that the CIA was blindsided](#) about the Egypt uprising by

failing to follow developments on Twitter. There is less evidence that social media played a strong a role in places like Yemen (where Internet penetration is low) or Libya (where the government controlled Internet means of distribution and cracked down more effectively). In Syria, where the “Arab Fall” and “Second Arab Spring” is still underway and the fighting has intensified and spread to Damascus’ suburbs, the [role of social media has also been more limited](#), out of fear that the government is monitoring online behavior and because the government learned from Egypt and Tunisia and cracked down heavily on social media. That said, the [Free Syrian Army \[Arabic FSA actual site is here\]](#) is threatening civil war in Syria and claims to represent 10,000 defected soldiers operating in small bands across Syria; [FSA](#) has posted a YouTube video and [claimed responsibility on Facebook](#) for the 11/16/11 assault on the Air Force Intelligence building. Disappointingly, Twitter and Google have also agreed to help the Syrian government and other oppressive regimes by enforcing rules that [censor tweets](#) or [blog posts](#) in Syria by blocking them out within-country. There have not been large-scale protests in Syria, making it hard to gauge the level of anti-government support, since large number of critics of the Assad regime may be refusing to demonstrate out of fear of being injured or killed.

### Tunisia:

The first domino was Tunisia where the underlying source of the uprising lay in government corruption,

inequality, censorship and joblessness (even among the well educated youth). The protests began in December 2010 with a college-educated street vendor's (Mohamed Bouazizi's) self-immolation in the coastal town of Sidi Bouzid in despair at the corruption and joblessness. He died from the burns, but his protest, despite Tunisia's strict web censorship laws, was rapidly fanned by online Internet tools.

*"Because the protests came together largely through informal online networks, their success has also raised questions about whether a new opposition movement has formed that could challenge whatever new government takes shape.*

*Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, a close ally from the president's hometown, announced on state television that he was taking power as interim president. But that step violated the Tunisian Constitution, which provides for a succession by the head of Parliament, something that Mr. Ghannouchi tried to gloss over by describing Mr. Ben Ali as "temporarily" unable to serve.*

*Yet by late Friday night [1/7/11], Tunisian [Facebook](#) pages previously emblazoned with the revolt's slogan, "Ben Ali, Out," had made way for the name of the interim president. "Ghannouchi Out," they declared.... And the protesters relied heavily on social media Web sites like Facebook and [Twitter](#) to circulate videos of each demonstration and issue calls for the next one. [["President of Tunisia Flees"](#), NY Times, 1/14/11]*

"By many accounts, the new arsenal of social networking helped accelerate Tunisia's revolution, driving the country's ruler of 23 years, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, into ignominious exile and igniting a conflagration that has spread across the Arab world at breathtaking speed. It was an apt symbol that a dissident blogger with thousands of followers on Twitter, [Slim Amamou](#), was catapulted in a matter of days from the interrogation chambers of Mr. Ben Ali's regime to a new government post as minister for youth and sports. It was a marker of the uncertainty in Tunis that he [had stepped down from the government by Thursday](#)." [[New York Times 1/30/11 article](#)]

"Other social media aspects of the revolution included Twitter updates with stories of state oppression, police brutality and unrest, and tweet feeds of imminent street protests.... Over 30,000 videos have now been placed on YouTube tagged "Sidi Bouzid." [[Online Social Media](#), 1/18/11 story]

### ***Egypt:***

Emboldened by the overthrow of Tunisia's Ben Ali, the protests spread to Egypt on January 25, 2011 where opposition leaders declared it a "[Day of Rage](#)" on which protesters would take to the street against President Hosni Mubarak's 30-year rule. The protesters included secularists, Islamists and Communists/ultra-left-wingers—a veritable *who's who* of the Egyptian opposition.

While exact numbers of protesters could not be estimated, a flood of internet photographs and videos showed a massive presence in Cairo, Alexandria, and other Egyptian cities. These protests lasted 18 days and Internet-savvy protesters used Twitpic, Facebook and YouTube to disseminate videos and photographs and called on Egyptians to protest. Protesters provided minute-by-minute tweets concerning where to assemble in an effort to

outwit police.

“More than 90,000 people signed up on a Facebook page for the Tuesday [Jan. 25] protests, framed by the organizers as a stand against torture, poverty, corruption and unemployment. But the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt’s most powerful opposition movement, said it would not officially participate, though some of its members joined the protesters in Cairo.” (*NY Times*, “[Broad Protests Across Egypt Focus Fury on Mubarak](#)“, 1/25/11)

The Egyptian government originally engaged in episodic censorship. One video posted to YouTube and then [shared on Facebook](#) claimed to show Egyptian riot police being assaulted and seriously injured by protesters. However, the video was taken offline for a Terms of Service violation. There were also reports of YouTube censorship of protest videos. “[D]uring protests on Tuesday [Jan. 25, 2011] and again on Wednesday [Jan. 26], many reported trouble accessing [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), the social networking sites that helped organize and spread news of the protests.” [*NY Times*]

The Internet crackdown began in earnest on January 28 when the government, amidst extremely large-scale demonstrations moved to fully restrict the Internet and cellular forms of mobilizing demonstrators. “Internet and cellphone connections had been disrupted or restricted in Cairo, Alexandria and other places, cutting off social-media Web sites that had been used to organize protests and complicating efforts by news media to report on events on the ground. Some reports said journalists had been singled out by police who used batons to beat and charge protesters. One cell phone operator, Vodafone, said on Friday that Egypt had told all mobile operators to suspend services in selected areas of the country The British company said it would comply with the order, Reuters reported.” [*New York Times*, “[Clashes in Cairo Extend Arab World's Days of Unrest](#)“, 1/28/2011]



Tahrir Square protest in Egypt, posted on Facebook page

Slate has a brief description of how, despite the Internet and cellphone limits, some one million protesters were mobilized for the 2/1/11 protest in Tahrir Square using old-school tactics:

*“Three young men from the ElBaradei Association for Change, a group that had been working to mobilize people and have them sign a petition to reform constitutional amendments passed in 2005 and 2007 that prevented an independent candidate from running for president, decided to take matters into their own hands. They would go into other neighborhoods and convince people to come to the square. “We’re going to go out on the streets and start screaming, ‘Down with Mubarak,’ and*

*asking people to join us. Once we get about 1,000 or 2,000, we will move toward downtown,” Tawfik Gamal told me, as we walked briskly toward the subway.*

*A little while after we set out, word came that other activists had the same idea, so Tawfik and his friends headed to a different neighborhood. I decided to stick with our original meeting point. As I waited in front of a major Cairo mosque in a wealthy neighborhood, I watched about 100 people walk by.*

*In front of the mosque, carrying home-made banners and bottles of soda, a small group of friends had congregated. They were the affluent upper-middle-class on the march. One of them is Ahmed El-Diwany. An IT manager at the American University in Cairo, he had moved back into his parents' home to be closer to the protests. He's not sure when Mubarak will fall, but he is sure that he will. “Mubarak is a Taurus, and so he is stubborn. He doesn't like looking weak—and he's a general. Put it all in a blender, and it's a lethal combination,” he tells me, totally serious.” [Slate]*

Mubarak's unsubtle crackdown on the Internet and cellphones, not only imposed great cost on the economy, but had the ironic consequence of actually radicalizing many rural Egyptians into opposing the Mubarak regime. In any event, Mubarak's countermove occurred after the dissension genie had already escaped the bottle and the revolution successfully ousted Mubarak.

“[With the internet crackdown,] President Hosni Mubarak betrayed his own fear — that Facebook, Twitter, laptops and smartphones could empower his opponents, expose his weakness to the world and topple his regime. There was reason for Mr. Mubarak to be shaken.” [[New York Times 1/30/11 article](#)]

On February 10, amidst unrelenting protests, Vice President Omar Suleiman announced that Mubarak had ceded power. Egyptians have now voted meaningfully for the first time ever, although [doubts remain about whether the protesters' gains are being eroded](#). And on May 23, 2012, Egyptians, in a historic election, for the first time voted for a replacement for Mubarak (one year after his departure).

**Libya:** In Libya, while the revolution was ultimately successful in ousting Muammar Gaddafi, social media played a minor role. Libya's government maintained strong control of the Internet infrastructure, and Gaddafi as an ego-maniacal autocrat responded only to insurgent militia, once they were aided by NATO.

**Syria/Jordan/Yemen/others:** Other middle-Eastern nations fear the shadow of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and fear that youth uprisings spurred by social networking mobilization or more traditional mobilization are taking hold. On Monday, January 31, 2011, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad unsuccessfully announced efforts to try to get ahead of a possible revolution there ([in a WSJ interview](#)). Jordan pre-emptively tried to avoid the Tunisian or Egyptian result with somewhat limited success. ([AP](#)) The Yemeni leader agreed not to run again or hand the reins to his son. [Here is a [great graphic](#) showing the spread of the Tunisian uprising to at least 18 other middle East countries (through April 11, 2011), with four other countries having overthrown their leader (Egypt, Libya, Ivory Coast and Yemen[?]) and another (Syria) at a tipping point. And this is the [current state of play by country](#).]

Although the role of social media is much lower in Syria's protest actions than countries like Tunisia or Egypt, individuals have risked their lives to use cellphones and small cameras to film atrocities of President Bashar Al-Assad's crackdown on the protesters and upload these images to Facebook or YouTube, fanning international pressure on Assad to back down. Assad has also used propagandistic websites like [Bashar al-Assad](#) and used social media to assert that protest videos are fake and that he has hundreds of thousands of loyal supporters.

Although only 15% of Syrians are online, [activist LeShaque claims](#) that without social media, the Syrian revolution would have been successfully repressed at an earlier stage, and notes that the government complains more about the media than the protests.

### **What was the role of social media?**

Social media must work hand-in-hand with an ability to mobilize citizens. It is far too easy to simply "Friend" or "Like" a movement on Facebook and a retweet is never enough. The challenge is to put boots on the street, as protesters in Tunisia, Egypt or Libya know only too well.

Everyone agrees that social media add new arrows to the quivers of social activists. These social media can be helpful in: a) mobilizing protesters rapidly; b) [undermining a regime's legitimacy](#); or c) [increasing national and international exposure to a regime's atrocities](#). Any use of these social media is likely to be more successful in a country that has some form of democracy; so far, the exit of Tunisia's Ben Ali is the only example we have of social media non-violently ousting an autocrat.

Malcolm Gladwell observes in "[The Revolution Will Not be Tweeted](#)" that successful social movements long predated social media. In an May 2011 interview with Fareed Zakaria on CNN's GPS (Global Public Square), he disputes the importance of social media in the mid-east uprisings and asserts that [protesters could have organized in other ways](#), noting that East Germany overturned a government when only 13% had landline phones. Moreover, Arab Spring uprisings are occurring in places like Yemen with low rates of Internet penetration. Journalist [Anthony Shadid](#) comments on Syria that: "It's not a Twitter or Facebook revolution. The revolution is in the streets, and it smells of blood."

Advocates of the new technology point out that the fact that there were successful revolutions before the telephone, doesn't mean that the telephone (or social media) might not enhance social protest or enable some protests to succeed where otherwise they would not have.

Malcolm Gladwell and Clay Shirky, "[From Innovation to Revolution](#)", *Foreign Affairs*, Response, March/April 2011 have an interesting brief exchange of their differing thoughts on the role of social media in revolutions. Zeynep Tufekci, [Why the 'how' of social organizing matters and how Gladwell's latest contrarian missive falls short](#) and David Weinberger, [Joho the Blog](#), "[Gladwell proves too much](#)" had quite thoughtful blog posts on this topic, criticizing Gladwell for his dismissal of the importance of social media.

Philip N. Howard, assoc. professor of communication at the Univ. of Washington, and other scholars have analyzed the millions of tweets, YouTube videos and blog posts and [concluded](#) that "social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring...[The evidence] suggests that social media carried a cascade of messages about freedom and democracy across North Africa and the Middle East, and helped raise

expectations for the success of political uprising. People who shared interest in democracy built extensive social networks and organized political action. Social media became a critical part of the toolkit for greater freedom.”

[Wael Abbas](#) (a prominent Egyptian blogger), when questioned on the role of social media in the Egyptian revolution, said: “Social media is a tool. But revolution is the decision of many people. Once we decided to have a revolution, once people decided to stay in the square, social media was a helpful tool to call for support, ask lawyers for help. I will not give social media all the credit, nor will I take away all the credit from social media.” He noted that the revolution is not yet over: “We’re not beyond the revolution. We now have a military junta, and people are being shot by armed officers, defending their interests. The army is protecting American, Israeli, Saudi interests in the country. They are protecting their own interests: the military aid from the US. The army is building factories and roads, and they’re not paying taxes, electricity or water. The labor for these projects are soldiers acting as slave labor.”

Wael Ghonim, who anonymously founded the Facebook site Kullena Khaled Said (“We Are All Khaled Said”) in sympathy with a 28-year old brutalized by police and called for the critical Tahrir Square Jan. 25, 2011 day of protest, wrote [Revolution 2.0](#) to chronicle the role of social media in Egypt’s uprising and the suspenseful tale of trying to stay ahead of the police. Hear [Wael, a 30-year old Google marketing executive, talk with Terri Gross of Fresh Air](#) here about the power of social media. [Interestingly, he made real efforts with his Facebook site to make this interactive and build individual investments and commitment in this, by asking those who affiliated electronically with the website to post videos of them carrying placards reading “We Are All Khaled Said” and answer electronic surveys about their thoughts, and by indicating that if 100,000 took to the streets to protest on Jan. 25, they couldn’t be stopped.]

It’s very hard to prove whether a revolution would or would not have happened barring the existence of social media [countries rarely offer themselves up for experimentation], but there may be some learnable lessons about some important dimensions in understanding how successful social media may be.

1) *The underlying strength of civil society*: Clay Shirky has an interesting piece “[The Political Power of Social Media](#)” in the January/February 2011 *Foreign Affairs* journal where he acknowledges the key role of civil society:

*“The more promising way to think about social media is as long-term tools that can strengthen civil society and the public sphere. In contrast to the instrumental view of Internet freedom, this can be called the environmental view. According to this conception, positive changes in the life of a country, including pro-democratic regime change, follow, rather than precede, the development of a strong public sphere. This is not to say that popular movements will not successfully use these tools to discipline or even oust their governments, but rather that U.S. attempts to direct such uses are likely to do more harm than good. Considered in this light, Internet freedom is a long game, to be conceived of and supported not as a separate agenda but merely as an important input to the more fundamental political freedoms.”*

2) *Whether government is a democracy or autocracy*. Thus far in the Middle East, Tunisia is the one example where a social-media-tinged uprising has successfully ousted an autocrat. This doesn’t mean that social media

can't be useful in bringing democracy, but if an autocratic leader is willing to brutally suppress dissent (as in Syria) and if outside countries don't intervene (as they did in Libya), social media may have less impact than one would expect in bringing democracy to the Middle East.

3) *The degree of Internet penetration and whether government controls the Internet infrastructure*: Obviously in countries with low internet penetration it is far more difficult to use the Internet to mobilize local masses, although it may still be a tool to garner international support. In Libya, where the state controlled the Internet and telephony, it was far easier to block use of these social media than in a country where telecommunications were privatized. In Egypt, the government secured Vodaphone's cooperation in blocking mobile communications, but foreign companies in the future may be less cooperative.

4) *Sophistication in Internet censorship or misinformation campaigns*: We are in the early stages of social media and the cat-and-mouse interplay between protesters and repressive regimes. In second-generation revolutions, the state is becoming more sophisticated about Internet controls, making it look like the Internet is active, but slowing speeds dramatically so video is ineffective or blocking certain words from appearing on trending lists or in search queries. Repressive governments have alas learned from Egypt's inept full-frontal blocking of the Internet. Regarding the use of misinformation, Gaddafi's attempt to claim that a protest rally video circulating was actually a pro-government rally looked foolish. Would other more sophisticated misinformation campaigns succeed? Will there be fake groups that form in an effort to flush out activists for persecution? Will government become more active in the Internet to try to direct protesters to incorrect locations where police are waiting?

5) *Unintended consequences from state action*: Related to point #4, we are also in the early days of understanding what types of government crackdowns succeed and which backfire and wind up bolstering the opposition (as Mubarak did in his shutting down of the Internet). Until we have a better handle on those dynamics we will be unsure of what the net-net impact of social media will be.

6) *How intertwined social media is in everyday life*: To the extent that a society uses social media mundanely but deeply in everyday commerce and social interaction, it will be much harder for countries to effectively dismantle these without huge economic and social costs.

Beyond any initial revolution, [Thomas Friedman pointed out in the NY Times on April 13](#) that starting the revolution may be the easier part. "In the Arab world, almost all these countries are Yugoslavia-like assemblages of ethnic, religious and tribal groups put together by colonial powers — except Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, which have big homogeneous majorities. So removing the lid off these countries may potentially unleash civil war, not civil society.

Friedman concludes: "That is why, for now, the relatively peaceful Arab democracy revolutions are probably over. They [first] happened in the two countries where they were most able to happen because the whole society in Tunisia and Egypt could pull together as a family and oust the evil 'dad' — the dictator. From here forward, we have to hope for 'Arab evolutions' or we're going to get Arab civil wars."

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Other links:

### **Tunisia:**

Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain, "[The Role of Digital Media](#)", *Journal of Democracy* 22(3):35-48(2011) has good background of what happened in Tunisia and Egypt in terms of social media.

- "[Tunisia Protesters Use Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to Organize And Report](#)" (LA Times Blog, 1/14/11).

- See *New Yorker*, "[Letter from Tunis: The Casbah Coalition](#)" (4/4/11 by Steve Coll)

- See "[The Use of Social Media Made Arab Spring Possible](#)"

### **Egypt:**

- See earlier Social Capital Blog post on [role of Facebook in earlier Egyptian uprising](#).

- As noted under the Tunisia section, Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain, "[The Role of Digital Media](#)", *Journal of Democracy* 22(3):35-48(2011) has good background of what happened in Egypt in terms of social media.

- *Fast Company* urged those interested in monitoring events to follow Egyptian journalist Mona el-Tahawy's [Twitter feed](#) and the wall of the Egyptian opposition el-Shaheed's [Facebook account](#), which posted minute-by-minute updates from hundreds of Egyptian Facebook users including photos and news of the latest events. They also commended Blogsofwar's [Egypt Twitter aggregator](#) for those who can read Arabic.

- See "[How Social Media Accelerated the Uprising in Egypt](#)", *Fast Company*, 2/3/11.

- Read also "[Facebook treads carefully after its vital role in Egypt's anti-Mubarak protests](#)" (Wash. Post, 2/2/2011).

- see, "[Twitter's Role in Arab Spring exaggerated, experts find](#)" (The National, 5/1/12) [Citing Arab Media Outlook Study (2011-2015), commissioned by the Dubai Press Club.]

### **Syria:**

See "[Will Syria's Revolution be Organized... on Facebook?](#)", *Fast Company*, 2/3/11.

Radwan Ziadeh explains why use of social media is much lower in Syria in "[The Double-Edged Sword of Social Media](#)" (7/11/2011)

"[Social Media and Syria's Revolution](#)" by Namu Abdulla (12/20/11)



- [Syria Interview: Activist “LeShaque” on Social Media and the Syrian Revolution](#) (1/15/2012)

### **Arab Spring generally:**

- Clay Shirky did an interesting short interview for the Annenberg [“Eye on the Middle East”](#) program (Nov. 10, 2011) on the use of social media in the Arab Spring.

For a broader description of just how game-changing the revolutions in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere in the Middle East may be, see Thomas Friedman's [“B.E., Before Egypt, A.E., After Egypt”](#) (2/1/11 NYT Op-Ed) [likening the impact to Israel as being similar to the impact on the U.S. if Canada and Mexico were both going through revolutions at the moment]

- See also [“Five Reasons why Arab regimes are falling”](#) (*Christian Science Monitor*, February 8, 2011 Op-Ed by Moataz Fattah) citing the fact that countries like Egypt have not leveraged physical capital (i.e., oil) into social capital for its residents.

- See also, Rory O'Connor (Huffington Post, 1/26/12), [“#january25 One Year Later: Social Media & Politics 3.0”](#)

### **Libya:**

- See [“Libya: How authorities have blocked the story”](#) (BBC, 2/25/2011)

- Doug Saunders has a very interesting Op-Ed in the [Globe and Mail](#) discussing social networks in Libya and Egypt in 2004 and 2011 and contrasting the difference. Excerpt:

*Certainly, the Libya I visited in 2004 was low on social capital. It was the only Arab country I've ever visited where men didn't gather in large crowds at street-side cafés to smoke and talk politics. This was illegal, and dangerous. Next door in Egypt, life for many was (and remains) a lonely oscillation between home, mosque and workplace, with nothing to bind people in a way that could change the country or its society.*

*Or so it seemed. But on that visit seven years ago, I noticed something else: Everyone I met under 20, even in fairly poor communities, spent their spare time at the Internet café. In the freedom of those places, in detailed conversations, I found teenagers forming intimate communities online, discussing cars and rap lyrics and sex and especially restrictions on Internet freedoms in neighbouring countries (Libya's Net was wide open then), and often coalescing in physical meet-ups. And that was Libya, one of the least free countries in the region.*

*Those teens are now around 24 – and half of all Egyptians and Libyans are 24 or under. In the past months, we have seen them form extraordinarily resilient and tightly linked voluntary communities using those Internet connections.*

*A fifth of Egyptians and more than a third of Tunisians have broadband at home, and the Internet cafés and cellphone web services mean that almost everyone under 24 has daily access.*

*Dictators and Islamists also use the Internet. But the young opponents keep showing that their social capital is more robust than we'd ever imagined: In the past seven weeks, we have seen [Facebook](#)-organized rallies drive out the old-regime prime ministers of Tunisia and Egypt and replace them with movement-associated figures. The towns and villages of Tunisia and Egypt, as I reported this week, are being transformed by local democracy committees, which have become an unstoppable force.*

*That's not to say that the Arab world's connected generation are going to have an easy time building a democratic society. But they certainly aren't [bowling alone](#).*

This entry was posted in [Abdelaziz Bouteflika](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [Algeria](#), [Ali Abdullah Saleh](#), [AP](#), [Arab Media Outlook](#), [Arab Spring](#), [Associated Press](#), [B.E.](#), [Bashar al-Assad](#), [BBC](#), [Before Egypt](#), [Ben Ali](#), [Cairo](#), [Casbah Coalition](#), [censor](#), [censorship](#), [christian science monitor](#), [CIA](#), [clay shirky](#), [CNN](#), [corruption](#), [David Weinberger](#), [Day of Rage](#), [Doug Saunders](#), [egypt](#), [facebook](#), [Fareed Zakaria](#), [fast company](#), [Foreign Affairs](#), [Globe & Mail](#), [Hosni Mubarak](#), [inequality](#), [internet](#), [joblessness](#), [Joho the Blog](#), [Jordan](#), [L.A. Times](#), [Letter from Tunis](#), [Libya](#), [malcolm gladwell](#), [Martin Croucher](#), [Mohamed Bouazizi](#), [Mohamed Ghannouchi](#), [Muzammil Hussain](#), [new york times](#), [new yorker](#), [online](#), [Online Social Media](#), [organizing](#), [Philip Howard](#), [protest](#), [Radwan Ziadeh](#), [revolution](#), [Revolution 2.0](#), [Sidi Bouzid](#), [slate](#), [social capital](#), [social change](#), [social media](#), [Steve Coll](#), [Syria](#), [Tahrir Square](#), [The National](#), [The Political Power of Social Media](#), [thomas friedman](#), [Tunisia](#), [TwitPic](#), [twitter](#), [unemployment](#), [uprising](#), [wael abbas](#), [Wael Ghonim](#), [wall street journal](#), [washington post](#), [We Are All Khaled Said](#), [Yemen](#), [YouTube](#), [Zeynep Tufekci](#) and tagged [Abdelaziz Bouteflika](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [Algeria](#), [Ali Abdullah Saleh](#), [AP](#), [Arab Media Outlook](#), [Arab Spring](#), [Associated Press](#), [B.E.](#), [Bashar al-Assad](#), [BBC](#), [Before Egypt](#), [Ben Ali](#), [Cairo](#), [Casbah Coalition](#), [censor](#), [censorship](#), [Christian Science Monitor](#), [CIA](#), [clay shirky](#), [CNN](#), [corruption](#), [David Weinberger](#), [Day of Rage](#), [Doug Saunders](#), [egypt](#), [facebook](#), [Fareed Zakaria](#), [fast company](#), [Foreign Affairs](#), [Globe & Mail](#), [Hosni Mubarak](#), [inequality](#), [internet](#), [joblessness](#), [Joho the Blog](#), [Jordan](#), [L.A. Times](#), [Letter from Tunis](#), [Libya](#), [malcolm gladwell](#), [Martin Croucher](#), [Mohamed Bouazizi](#), [Mohamed Ghannouchi](#), [Muzammil Hussain](#), [new york times](#), [new yorker](#), [online](#), [Online Social Media](#), [organizing](#), [Philip Howard](#), [protest](#), [Radwan Ziadeh](#), [revolution](#), [Revolution 2.0](#), [Sidi Bouzid](#), [slate](#), [social capital](#), [social change](#), [social media](#), [Steve Coll](#), [Syria](#), [tahrir square](#), [The National](#), [The Political Power of Social Media](#), [thomas friedman](#), [Tunisia](#), [TwitPic](#), [twitter](#), [unemployment](#), [uprising](#), [wael abbas](#), [Wael Ghonim](#), [wall street journal](#), [washington post](#), [We Are All Khaled Said](#), [Yemen](#), [YouTube](#), [Zeynep Tufekci](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

## 6 RESPONSES TO TWITTER, FACEBOOK AND YOUTUBE'S ROLE IN ARAB SPRING (MIDDLE EAST UPRISINGS) [UPDATED 5/23/12]

[FX](#) | January 27, 2011 at 12:17 am | [Reply](#)

Censorship causes blindness. Very unfortunate that they have to turn to something so low.



[Shut The Folk Up](#) | March 6, 2011 at 9:07 am | [Reply](#)

It's great to see social media being exploited for powerful political purposes, but is this an example of



social capital? In Putnam's own succinct definition, social capital is not only about social networks, but trust and reciprocity. Are short-lived bursts of violent political action real evidence of social capital? Granted, they were generated by social networks, but not ones of tangible and long lasting value.

I feel this is something that really needs to be addressed.

**socialcapital** | [March 7, 2011 at 12:46 pm](#) | [Reply](#)



I would refer to Bob Putnam's comments in the [OECD Observer](#): "As would be true of any new concept whose use has exploded exponentially in a short space of time, people use the term in a variety of ways. But I would insist on a lean and mean definition: social capital refers to social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity.

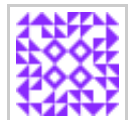
"The core idea is very simple: Social networks have value. They have value to people in the networks – "networking" is demonstrably a good career strategy, for example. But they also have 'externalities,' that is, effects on bystanders. Dense social networks – barbecues or dinner parties or whatever – in a neighbourhood can deter crime, even benefiting local people who don't themselves go to the barbecues."

"Not all externalities are positive. Some networks have been used to raise finance for terrorism. Just as human and physical capital – through knowledge of chemistry or aircraft, for instance – can be used for bad purposes, so can social capital.

"Moreover, social capital comes in many forms, not all fungible. A dentist's drill and an oil-rigger's drill are not interchangeable. Similarly, we need to distinguish among different types of social capital, like the difference between "bonding" social capital – these are links among people who are similar in ethnicity, age, social class, or whatever – and "bridging" social capital, which are links that cut across various lines of social cleavage.

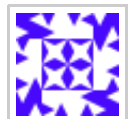
"But the main point is that social networks can be a powerful asset, both for individuals and for communities."

**[Steve Distant](#)** | [August 12, 2011 at 3:39 pm](#) | [Reply](#)



Loved, loved this Gladwell book. I was fortunate to get a pre-release and I am grateful. I found it to be unlike any social media book I have read in the past, a must read for fellow business owners. It's like a PhD in the art of being likable!

**[syria chat](#)** | [April 4, 2012 at 12:43 pm](#) | [Reply](#)



thats really true  
arab people did it using social media.. with help of politicians

[aadilfahim](#) | [May 20, 2012 at 5:43 am](#) | [Reply](#)



Great write-up! Social media did play an important role, but yes, we should accredit the people too who came altogether to stand up for their rights. Wael is right about social media being a tool. It became a medium for those common people who had same thought process and were fighting for same cause.

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